The Southern PATRIOT

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PETITION TO SENATE URGES PROBE OF MISS. ATROCITIES

The Senate Subcommittee on Human Rights has been urged to investigate the infringement upon the federal rights of citizens in Mississippi. A delegation of twenty distinguished citizens presented a petition to Senator William Langer of the subcommittee in Washington on February 3.

The document was signed by more than 2,600 persons residing in all of the 48 states and asked that hearings be held in Mississippi at the earliest possible moment. The project was coordinated by the SCEF.

Bishop Edgar A. Love of the Baltimore area of the Methodist Church served as spokesman for the group. He said in his remarks: "Thousands of white Mississippians desire justice and fair treatment for the victims of this oppression. But these white citizens are condemned to silence by the same lawless forces that have turned the whole apparatus of state government against the colored people. How can the Negro citizens of Mississippi hope for protection through the machinery of state government, when the legislature of that state is undertaking to assess penalties against all persons, including agents of the F.B.I., who are found to be 'interfering with state law under the color of federal authority'?

"Faced with blended issues of simple morality, global reputation and the integrity of our government, we appeal to the Congress of the United States not to stand aloof . . . Through hearings in Mississippi, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights can determine whether new laws are needed to deal with the crisis in civil rights. It can stimulate more effective enforcement of existing federal statutes. And the committee can do more. By throwing light upon the dark happenings in that state, it can marshal a local, a sectional and a national public opinion which would encourage the fair-minded white people of Mississippi to exercise their own constitutional liberties and help to establish the orderly supremacy of law. What we are witnessing in that state and elsewhere is not the rise of new forces of oppression but the desperate flare-up of ancient prejudices which the American people, North, South, East and West, are casting out of their minds and hearts."

Senator William Langer Receives Petition: L. to R., Sen. Langer, Rev. W. H. Jernagin, Chmn., of the Board, National Fraternal Council of Churches, D. C.; Bishop Edgar A. Love, Judge W. C. Hueston, Grand Secretary, B. P. O. E., D. C.; Dr. James L. Hupp, Professor of Education, West Virginia Wesleyan College.

Mrs. Andrew W. Simkins, SCEF vice-president from Columbia, S. C., in another statement declared: "Coming as I do from the state of South Carolina, a full sister to the state of Mississippi, I speak not without much misgiving because of conditions where the homes of three Negroes have been shotgun blasted and a church of the Living God burned within the last six months. I feel, however, that my experiences in the fight for full freedom and the more abundant life in South Carolina qualify me to implore the gentlemen of this committee to hold intensive and far-ranging investigations into the conditions of law enforcement and the full and free enjoyment of constitutional rights by Negroes in the state of Mississippi.

"The wanton murder of Negro citizens, one after another in Mississippi, has become a mere incident in a day's frivolities, gaining little attention and creating less concern than would the killing of a pet animal on the highway. . . .

"Since the above conditions do obtain, and since the lot of Negroes is becoming more hopeless and helpless every day, I beg this committee to go into the state of Mississippi in the name of Our Lord, and for the sake of Negroes now marked for slaughter, and other Negroes who positively will be killed on any mere whim, including the constitutional right to vote.

"Did not Thomas Jefferson say, 'I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and Justice does not sleep forever'?"

SCEF President Aubrey Williams, Montgomery, Ala., publisher, also made an appeal for action on behalf of the white people of the South. Dr. James L. Hupp of West Virginia Wesleyan College read the petittion. The names of signers from Mississippi were withheld, Bishop Love pointed out, "to protect the signers from possible reprisals." Represented on the petition were more than 300 educators, 124 members of the clergy, some 100 physicians, dentists and lawyers, some 100 union and organizational officials and more than 30 business men.

ALABAMA: BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY WAGED AGAINST ODDS

The state of Alabama is paradoxical among Deep South states. Its topography ranges from ore-red mountains to tropical marshes, its economy from steel mills to cotton fields. It can nourish such sinister organizations as the Ku Klux Klan and the Citizens Councils. Yet its native sons number such enlightened leaders as Hugo Black and Aubrey Williams. Naturally enough the present period of transition in the South is reflected sharply and dramatically in Alabama. The following first-hand reports and the statement by Mr. Williams are presented in the effort to convey some of the raw courage now being displayed there by the partisans of democracy.

Boycotters Defy Bombs

In Montgomery, Ala., the Negro boycott of city business, 100 per cent effective since Dec. 5, has provoked the local racists to violence. Twice within the week of Jan. 29 bombs rocked the homes of Negro leaders. The Negro community has retaliated by instituting federal suits to have city and state transportation segregation laws ruled unconstitutional.

The first victim was the Rev. M. L. King, 26-year-old head of the Montgomery Improvement Assn., which has been coordinating boycott strategy. Previously he had been arrested, fingerprinted and "shaken down" on a fake speeding charge. Then, on the night of Jan. 30, a grenade or stick of dynamite was thrown against his home, destroying the front part. His wife and seven-months-old baby and a neighbor were inside, but no one was hurt.

On Feb. 2, five Negro women filed suit in federal court seeking injunctions against enforcement of Jim Crow transit laws on the ground that they violated the 14th Amendment. One of the women was pressured into withdrawing her name. That same night a blast went off in the lawn of E. D. Nixon, a Brotherhood of Sleeping-Car Porters official who is past president of the Alabama NAACP. Nixon, an SCEF board member, has been a militant fighter for Negro rights. In 1952 he ran a creditable race for a post on the county Democratic Party committee. Last year, when he applied for a ticket to a state Democratic fund-raising dinner in Birmingham and was refused, Michigan Governor G. Mennen Williams canceled his speaking engagement.

City officials expressed their disapproval of the bombings and posted a $500 reward for the capture of the guilty parties. But they cannot escape responsibility for having created an atmosphere of hysteria that made violence almost inevitable. On Jan. 22 Mayor "Tacky" Gale, declaring that he was through "pussyfooting" with Negro demands for a fairer seating arrangement on buses, announced that he and the other members of the city commission had joined the Central Alabama White Citizens Council. Immediately police, often accompanied by W.C.C. members, began harassing Negro drivers manning the volunteer jitney service.

Although white opposition to the goings-on has not been expressed in any organized fashion, strong disgust seems to be growing in influential circles. Local bankers and merchants recognize that Montgomery, as lily-white and Jim Crow as it might like to be, is nevertheless dependent for its prosperity on two thoroughly integrated federal institutions: Maxwell and Gunter Air Force Bases, both located at the edge of the city. Air Force spending in 1955 contributed $57 million to the local economy as opposed to the $19 million yielded by cattle and agricultural produce, the traditional source of major revenue. They fear that if the racial strife continues the city may be declared off-limits to military.

An End To Bourbon Rule?

Reapportionment of the Alabama legislature is closer to reality than at any time in the past fifty years. Under Gov. James E. Folsom's vigorous prodding the state house of representatives on Feb. 4 passed a bill which would do much to end the control south Alabama planters have enjoyed over the machinery of government for more than a half century. The state senate had previously approved the measure and now, as a constitutional amendment, it needs the endorsement of the people before becoming law.

This does not mean that the Black Belt land barons amiably decided to commit political suicide. The proposal, as its opponents pointed out, does not call for "true" reapportionment. It adds to the membership of the legislature, giving some counties more but not taking away from any of the others. It would increase the senate from 35 to 67, with one senator coming from each county, and increase the house from 106 to a total of 152. Although the basis of allotting house members is set at one per 25,000 population, seven Black Belt counties with less than that number of residents are given two representatives as a sort of "bonus." (However, after the 1960 census, the legislature is empowered to change this formula.)

At present, Jefferson County (Birmingham) with nearly 700,000 population has seven representatives, while several Black Belt counties with populations of less than 20,000 have two. Jefferson County would get 14 under the new set-up. Like gains would be made by the state's other major cities and by the industrialized northern counties where population has been rapidly growing.

On Feb. 3 Governor Folsom allowed an "interposition" resolution to become law without his signature. The bill declares that the U.S. Supreme Court decisions outlawing racial segregation do not apply in Alabama. It passed the legislature by overwhelming votes, but Folsom called the idea "hogwash." He accused the lawmakers of "baying at the moon."

Univ. Bows to Mob Rule

Miss Authurine J. Lucy on Feb. 3 became the first Negro ever to attend the University of Alabama.

A second Negro applicant, Mrs. Polly Anne Hudson, was denied entrance by the registrar on the ground that her "past conduct and marital activities" made her unsuitable. (She is seeking a divorce from her husband.)

Prior to the admission of the Negro woman fiery crosses were burned at various points on the campus. University officials made no attempt to curb the demonstrations. Two men caught carrying an unlighted cross were released without any charges being filed.

After 3 days of violent demonstrations the Board of Trustees closed the door of the University to Miss Lucy, forcing her to turn to the courts for a second order.

This niggling behavior contrasts sharply with the manner in which integration was instituted at other Southern colleges. But it has not discouraged the hunger of Alabama's Negro students for decent educational facilities. Virtually every professional school in the university has a score or more of applications on hand.

AUBREY WILLIAMS: THE SOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS AGAIN

(Aubrey Williams, president of the SCEF, has spurred the conscience of the South on many occasions in years past. His most recent statement, printed below, again summarizes the regional situation with accuracy and presents a challenge Southerners cannot deny.)

I don't know how to say what is in my heart on what is happening in the South today in regard to the decision of the Supreme Court outlawing segregation. I suppose the best way is just to say it in the most simple and honest way that I know how.

Well, here goes.

First, I am a Southerner, born and bred in the South, in Alabama; but I am an inhabitant and a citizen of the United States also, and have been all of my life.

I was brought up to believe in the words and teachings of three documents, they were all sacred in my home; the Bible, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

I was taught to respect the rights of others; to never bear false witness; to honor my father and mother and to do unto others as I would have others do unto me.

To me these words and teachings of the Old and New Testament were supported by the words which our founding fathers wrote into the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, such as:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. . . ."

These and similar words I have always regarded as the basis of our Constitution and laws.

Therefore, what is happening in the South today seems to me to flout and mock the teachings of the Bible, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. And I think most Southerners feel that way about it, but do not know what to do about it.

I cannot believe the ministers of the Churches of Montgomery condone, much less approve the forceable removal, handcuffing and taking to jail of a 13-year-old Negro girl from a bus because she would not get up and give her seat to a white person. Yet not one of these men of religion raised his voice in protest. Nor did any lawyer, physician, teacher or machinist.

Still I do not believe that they approved of it. I felt that the community was ashamed of what had happened, but lacked the leader who would ignite the spark to say it was an evil that should not be tolerated.

I do not believe that most Mississippians go along with and approve the amendment giving the legislature the right to abolish public schools. Men voted as they did because they feared not to.

I do not believe that most Southerners approve the economic reprisals being meted out to Negroes who sign petitions asking that the decision of the Court be carried out. I do not believe that they approve of what happened to a Negro who has been unable to get work since he signed such a petition, though he is a skilled workman, whose excellent work is known by every one in this particular community. I don't think that the decent people of the South can forever remain silent in the face of these and similar flagrant acts of injustice and lawlessness.

But I have to admit that it has been a long and soreberidden road which the South has travelled since those unfortunate days when in the early years of 1800 slavery was fed into its plains and deltas. There have been days when the clouds seemed near to clearing. There was the day in the 1830's when the Legislature of Virginia came within 7 votes of abolishing slavery. There was the day when Wade Hampton, Governor of South Carolina, gave his pledge to President Rutherford B. Hayes that he would see to it that Negroes would have all of the rights and opportunities that whites had, and went back home with a sincere determination to do it, and was well on his way to succeed when a few big plantation owners raised the cry against him and wrecked his efforts. There was the time that the populist movement led by Tom Watson included the Negro and was making solid headway toward the inclusion of the Negro in American political life, only to have big business of the North, led by such men as Henry Grady, join hands with plantation owners of the South to put a stop to it.

We are at another crossroads in the South. Which road will the South take? Will it be turned back into a culture which mocks the teachings of the Bible, which flouts the Bill of Rights and holds in contempt the Supreme Court? Or will it at long last become a full-fledged member of the United States and put into practice the teachings of the Bible and accept and put into effect the tenets of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution which its own Southern forebears had such a large part in writing?

If history teaches one lesson above others it is that no people have ever become impaired or weakened or destroyed by extending to others the blessings and opportunities by which they themselves have become strong.

Above all else, these difficult days, we in the South should remember this fact.

AUBREY WILLIAMS,
Montgomery, Ala.

Delegation that Conferred with Senator Langer. First row: Aubrey Williams, SCEF president, Montgomery, Ala.; Mrs. Ethel Clyde, Huntington, N. Y., Rev. W. H. Jernigan, Chmn. of the Board, National Fraternal Council of Churches, D. C.; Bishop Edgar A. Love, Dr. James L. Hupp. Second row: Judge W. C. Hueston; Jim Dombrowski, Exec.-Dir., SCEF, New Orleans, La.; Mrs. Andrew W. Simkins, Sec'y., S. C. Conference NAACP, Columbia, S. C.; Rev. M. M. L. Perdue, Louisville, Ky.; Mrs. Donald Stephens, Wilmington, Del., Rev. B. Franklin Auld, Baltimore, Md., Miss Cleomine Lewis, D. C.; Donald Stephens, Elizabeth Christmas, D. C.; Marcus I. Goldman, Ph.D., D. C.; Dr. Lewis S. C. Smythe, College of the Bible, Lexington, Ky. Third row: Harry Hueston, Assoc. Grand Sec'y., B. P. O. E., D. C.; Dr. E. B. Henderson, President, NAACP of Va.; Marvin Caplan, D. C. Present but not in picture, Mrs. A. J. E. Davis, Vice-President, Council of Church Women, Arlington, Va.